

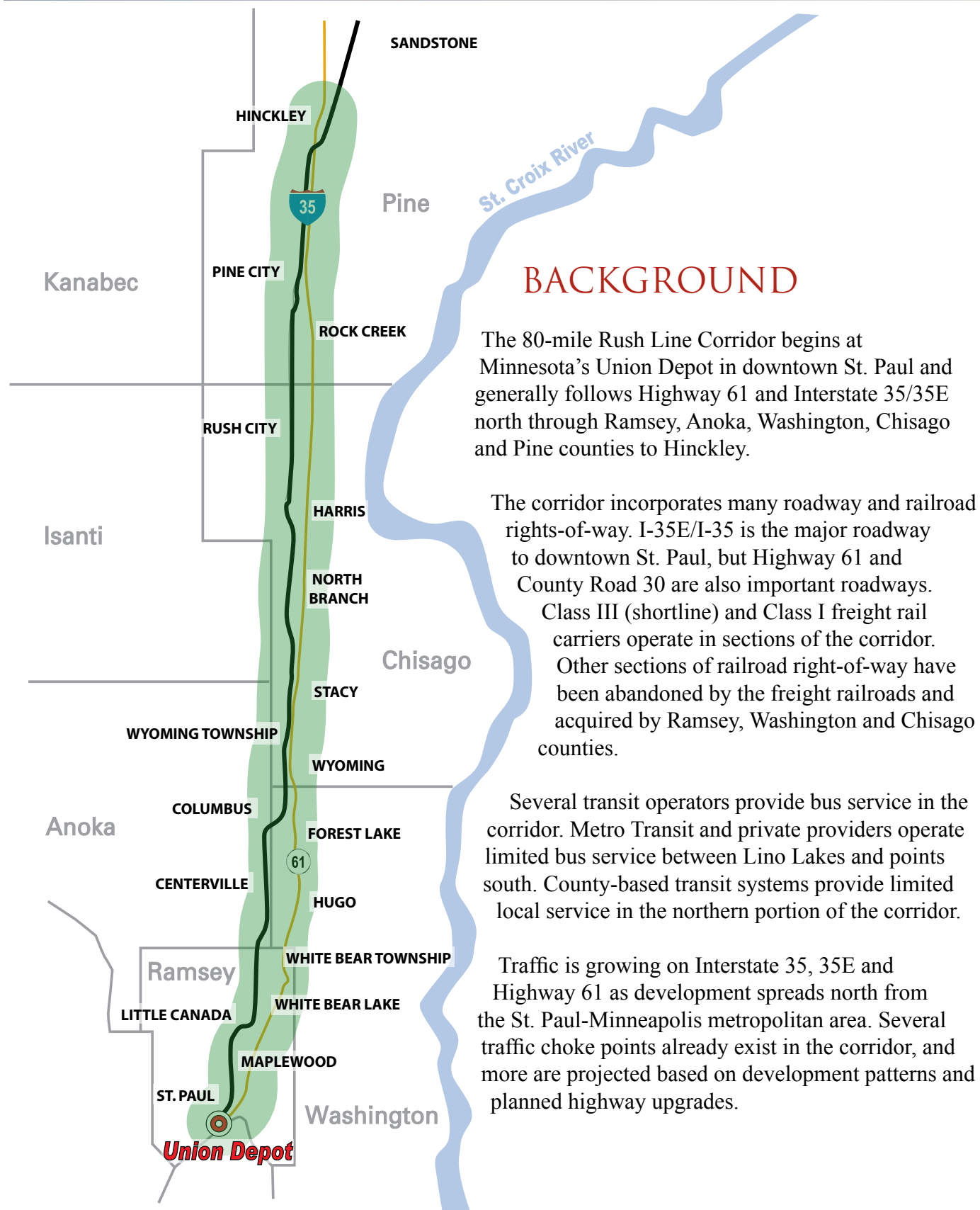


RUSH LINE CORRIDOR 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED BY THE RAMSEY COUNTY REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY

January 2009

2008 ANNUAL REPORT



BACKGROUND

The 80-mile Rush Line Corridor begins at Minnesota's Union Depot in downtown St. Paul and generally follows Highway 61 and Interstate 35/35E north through Ramsey, Anoka, Washington, Chisago and Pine counties to Hinckley.

The corridor incorporates many roadway and railroad rights-of-way. I-35E/I-35 is the major roadway to downtown St. Paul, but Highway 61 and County Road 30 are also important roadways. Class III (shortline) and Class I freight rail carriers operate in sections of the corridor. Other sections of railroad right-of-way have been abandoned by the freight railroads and acquired by Ramsey, Washington and Chisago counties.

Several transit operators provide bus service in the corridor. Metro Transit and private providers operate limited bus service between Lino Lakes and points south. County-based transit systems provide limited local service in the northern portion of the corridor.

Traffic is growing on Interstate 35, 35E and Highway 61 as development spreads north from the St. Paul-Minneapolis metropolitan area. Several traffic choke points already exist in the corridor, and more are projected based on development patterns and planned highway upgrades.

2008 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Forest Lake Transit Center

Work was completed on the new, state-of-the-art transit center in Forest Lake. The building opened in March, with landscaping completed in August. This facility provides more than 300 park and ride spots, a heated and cooled building with vending machines and restrooms along with a connection to the Hardwood Creek Regional Trail. This facility is served by Route 288, Forest Lake/Columbus to Minneapolis commuter coach service, and Jefferson Lines intercity service between the Twin Cities and Duluth. It is also identified as a station on the proposed Forest Lake to St. Paul commuter coach service.

Transit Studies

The Rush Line Corridor Task Force continued its work on the Alternatives Analysis for the Corridor. The study, which began in 2007, will identify and compare the benefits, costs, and impacts of a range of transit alternatives for the Corridor. The study will analyze bus, light rail, and commuter rail options to determine the best transit solution for the Corridor. The Alternatives Analysis is the first step in securing Federal Transit Administration New Starts funding for transit improvements. The study will conclude in late 2009.

In early 2008 the Task Force continued working to implement the bus service scenario it selected at its August 2007 Task Force Meeting. This scenario would improve transit service by providing coach bus service from the North Branch area to downtown St. Paul with intermediate stops at Forest Lake and White Bear Lake. Funding for the service was requested from the 2008 Legislature.

In July 2008, the Task Force requested that staff analyze a shorter route and provide a new cost and ridership estimate. This route is from Forest Lake to downtown St. Paul with a stop in the White Bear Lake area. Ridership and cost estimates were completed and funding was requested from Task Force members. Chisago, Ramsey, Washington and Anoka Counties agreed to provide the funds necessary to run the service as a one-year demonstration project. It is anticipated that routing and fares will be finalized in early 2009 with service beginning by that summer.

TASK FORCE

The Rush Line Corridor Task Force is made up of elected officials from counties and municipalities along the corridor. In 2008, members of the Task Force included:

- Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, Chair Ramsey County
- Commissioner Ben Montzka, Vice Chair Chisago County
- Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah Anoka County
- Commissioner Roger Nelson Pine County
- Commissioner Dennis Hegberg Washington County
- Mayor Mary Capra Centerville
- Council Member Renae Fry Columbus
- Council Member Susan Young Forest Lake
- Council Member Wayne Buisman Harris
- Council Member Dave Hopkins Hinckley
- Council Member Michael Granger Hugo
- Mayor Bill Blesener Little Canada
- Council Member Will Rossbach Maplewood
- Council Member Theresa Furman North Branch
- Council Member Mark Nisley Pine City
- Council Member Lee Raudabaugh Rock Creek
- Council Member Mick Louzek Rush City
- Council Member Leonard Bonander Sandstone
- Council Member Dave Thune St. Paul
- Mayor John Daher Stacy
- Council Member Bryan Belisle White Bear Lake
- White Bear Township
- Council Member Gary Menne Wyoming
- Supervisor Mark Utecht Wyoming Township

RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

On January 7, 2008, Route 288, a one-year commuter bus demonstration route, was introduced from the Forest Lake Transit Center to downtown Minneapolis. In May additional bus trips were added along with a stop at a new park and ride in the City of Columbus. Emergency funding was provided by the United States Department of Transportation to provide relief during the reconstruction of the I-35W Bridge. The service has been successful and will be continued through 2009 with a plan in place for 2010 and beyond. The success of Route 288 service offers a glimpse into the potential for the Forest Lake to St. Paul demonstration service.



PRIOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1999

Rush Line Corridor Task Force, a joint powers board of counties and cities along a corridor from Minnesota's Union Depot to Hinckley, is formed.

2001

Federal funds were obtained to complete a transit study. A decision was made by the Rush Line Task Force to pursue both short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals were to preserve rights-of-way for future transit use and to construct facilities such as park-and-ride lots that would benefit the long-term goal of busway and rail transit in the Rush Line Corridor.

2005

Rush Line contributed funds to assist with completing a park-and-ride lot at Maplewood Mall in Ramsey County.

2006

- An 85-car park-and-ride lot opened south of North Branch at County State Aid Highway 17 near Interstate 35 along the Rush Line Corridor. This park-and-ride facility has expansion capacity for 400 vehicles.
- Two vans were purchased with Rush Line funds in 2005. The vehicles were fully leased for vanpool operation in 2006. One vanpool originates each day in Chisago County and carries people to Guidant and Boston Scientific in Arden Hills. The vanpoolers live in Chisago City, Forest Lake, Lindstrom, Harris and North Branch. A new group, vanpooling between North Branch and Guidant/Boston Scientific, began leasing a van in December.



2007

- Construction started on the Forest Lake Transit Center with the park and ride lot completed in time for the initiation of Route 288 commuter bus service to Minneapolis.
- Route 288, a one-year demonstration service between Forest Lake and Minneapolis, was planned for and publicized in preparation for its January 2008 launch. Additional service and a stop at the Columbus park and ride were added in May.
- The Rush Line Bus Study was completed and a service plan was adopted. The plan included service from the North Branch Area to downtown St. Paul with intermediate stops in Forest Lake and White Bear Lake. The Task Force approved seeking funding for the service from the 2008 Legislature.
- Work on the Rush Line Corridor Alternatives Analysis continued throughout 2007. Analysis will include the identification of modes and alignments that maximize benefits and minimize impacts to Corridor stakeholders. The study will conclude in 2009.
- A Capitol Open House was hosted by the Task Force in February to increase awareness of the Corridor.

VISIT US ON THE WEB



WWW.RUSHLINE.ORG

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2008 RUSH LINE CORRIDOR TASK FORCE

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- Commissioner Ben Montzka, Vice Chair
- Commissioner Rhonda Sivarajah
- Commissioner Roger Nelson
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